

## WOMAN AS A DIRTY MACHINE: A QUESTION OF OBJECTIFICATION ON E.E. CUMMINGS

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### Abstract

The pervasiveness of female objectification in the treatment of women by men has been called out as a manifestation of gender hierarchy and domination. This research analyzed the figurative languages used in E.E. Cummings' poem *first she like a piece of ill-oiled* to identify his treatment of women seen through the illustration of the persona's actions, thoughts and feelings. Dynamics of the personas' sexual relationships are then identified to analyze how aspects of objectification appear in the relation between men and women. In order to reinforce the notion of objectification, dehumanization as its extension is utilized as a supporting theory. It is found that practices of female objectification occur in the poem with varying degrees of intensity and ways that it is conducted. However, the objectification is concealed by the poem's presentation of women as a sexually liberated being, yet in practice, her sexuality is still being objectified. The objectification extends up to the conduct of dehumanization which reduces the women into a dirty mechanical object.

### Keywords

objectification; dehumanization; Cummings; erotic poetry; figurative language

### Abstrak

Objektifikasi perempuan yang meliputi perlakuan lelaki terhadap perempuan telah dianggap sebagai pengejawantahan hirarki dan dominasi gender. Penelitian ini menganalisis majas yang digunakan dalam puisi E.E. Cummings berjudul *first she like a piece of ill-oiled* guna mengidentifikasi perlakuan Cummings terhadap perempuan yang tampak dari ilustrasi tindakan, pemikiran dan perasaan aku lirik. Dinamika hubungan seksual aku lirik kemudian diidentifikasi untuk menganalisis bagaimana aspek-aspek objektifikasi muncul dalam relasi antara lelaki dan perempuan. Untuk memperkuat argumen mengenai objektifikasi, digunakan teori tambahan berupa dehumanisasi yang merupakan perpanjangan dari objektifikasi. Ditemukan bahwa praktek objektifikasi terjadi pada puisi tersebut dengan tingkatan, intensitas dan cara yang berbeda. Namun objektifikasi perempuan tertutupi oleh bagaimana puisi-puisi tersebut menyajikan perempuan sebagai sosok yang telah terbebaskan secara seksual, tetapi pada prakteknya, seksualitasnya tetap diobjektifikasi. Objektifikasi yang terjadi mencapai tingkat dehumanisasi yang menurunkan perempuan menjadi objek berupa mesin yang dianggap kotor.

### Kata Kunci

objektifikasi; dehumanisasi; Cummings; puisi erotis; majas

## BACKGROUND

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A skim through the lines from one of E.E. Cummings' renowned poems will show readers his legendary disorganized treatment of writer's poetic license that is vividly apparent. It is evident that he skipped proper grammar, not placing punctuation in appropriate positions, and experimented by omitting space between words. Furthermore, these lines are erotic yet the sexual impression is not shown on the surface because it exists in the metaphoric meaning; the speaker's sexual climax is illustrated by the simultaneous slamming of foot pedal and hand break of the automobile.

This paper aims to make an original contribution in the poetry and feminist literary criticism by examining the ways that female objectification is practiced in the figurative languages of E. E. Cummings' poem titled *first she like a piece of ill-oiled*. Having his poems rested on the completion of the self through the meeting of the other, and that sexual interaction, the fusion of the mind and the flesh, pervades the two's encounter, Cummings' poem have intensely explored the immeasurable possibilities of what sexuality can take form of as a medium to rebel against Puritanical values of his family's Harvard academic background.

Abele (1955, p. 914) who examined Cummings' growth throughout his career, mapped down the five distinctive features of his poetry which are, "Three—typographical rhetoric, syntactic dislocation, and word-formation-are matters of technique, while the other two—the treatment of science and intellect, and of romantic love—are thematic". Cummings' experimental treatment of traditional themes in his poem is what made him known as an avant-garde modernist poet.

Kennedy reported that Cummings had three marriages. In 1924 he married Elaine Orr, his mentor's wife who already carried Cummings' offspring when she had not divorced her former husband. They had known each other from 1918 which was

the year he returned from captivity in France. However, their marriage ended in a year. Cummings then remarried in 1929 to Anne Barton and divorced in 1932. The failures in his love life are reported to result in Cummings' change of attitude from what Kennedy described as "a vivacious young celebrant of life to a cynical, hard-hitting critic of American culture" (ibid.).

Cummings' later publications of his poems which are *Is 5* (1926), *ViVa* (1931), and *No Thanks* (1935) were said to reflect his bitterness. Cummings next and last marriage was said to transform his tone. This is due to his satisfaction towards his relationship with Marion Morehouse, a fashion model whom he married in 1934 and stayed with until his death. This elation is reflected in the later books of *50 Poems* (1940), *1 X 1* (1944), and *Xaipe* (1950).

Kennedy went on to mention that the two styles which are most embedded on Cummings are the Romantic through his traditional themes such as "a tribute to love, an address to the moon, the praise of a church, a prayer of thanks for the ability to respond to life" (ibid.) and avant-garde through his linguistic experiments. Tal-mason reported that Cummings' own remark on his poems is reflected in his 1953 published lectures titled *i: six non-lectures*.

In the lectures, he conveyed that there exists two worlds. The worlds are the real realm of time and matter where humans live, grow and die and the ideal realm where time is non-existent and abstract ideas of the "immeasurable absolutes" are present (1968, p. 90). Cummings' intense exploitation on the theme of love originates from Cummings' thought that the connection human made between these two realms is made possible through the tool of love. Cummings went on to saying that the connection is realized during moments of one's self-discovery when the two realms joined into what he calls a "homogeneous duality."

Tal-mason said that this connection is paradoxical in nature; how could a kind of duality which is supposed to oppose each other be homogeneous in nature. However, she quickly added that paradox has always been the characteristic of Cummings' poems which acknowledges the existence of the two worlds. Love as Cummings' focal point of view functions as a medium through which humans strive to reach the absolute.

Tal-mason then explicated that even though Cummings' views were heavily centered on the self, Cummings realized that in order to reach wholeness, the self needs to love. From that point on, the mysteries that love entails which are "the natural world, the created world of art, and the world of other loving human beings" (ibid.) will be revealed. She added on that Cummings' treatment of love in his poems is his translation of Plato's dissertation of love in the *Symposium* dated 385-380 BC. Plato asserts that there is a beast with two backs that was cut in two by Zeus. The two cuts then became male and female.

This idea is heavily-infused in Cummings' poem with the basic thought that the

poet or lover will only be complete upon the finding of the other and that he is searching in the realms of reality and unreality (ibid.) Again, this feature of him led him to be deemed as a Romantic because of the focused subject of “reintegration of the self with the other” (ibid.). The weight of Cummings’ emphasis on love is observable through his poems of love. However, he took it further by fixing the means of love on what Talmason recalled as “direct sexual connotations; Cummings’ love is a fusion of the mind and flesh of two people” (ibid.).

Cummings went so far as to transmute his ideas on love into his renowned erotic lines. It cannot be denied that many of Cummings followers gravitated towards what Sickels called his “naughty-boyisms” that function to startle and annoy readers (1954, p. 223). Kirsch noted that Cummings’ popularity was a result of his rebelliousness that was in line with America’s transforming permissiveness of the early twentieth century. He dismissed the social conventions of sex and withdrew his poems from sexual Puritanism; a move he acted on to subtly oppose his Puritan father and academic background of Cambridge (2005, p. 1).

However, critics have focused more on the linguistic technique of his sexual rebellion than the underlying subject matter of his poems. His captivating linguistic deviation seems to have caught more of the critics’ attention than Cummings’ patriarchal treatment of women. What is even rarer is a feminist point of view in the reading of Cummings’ works. The researches that have been conducted on him have limited their analysis to the linguistic aspects of the poem and did not go so far as to contribute a comprehensive feminist view on him<sup>1</sup>.

Having his poems resting on the completion of the self through the meeting of the other, and that sexual interaction, the fusion of the mind and the flesh, pervades the encounter of the two, Cummings’ poem have intensely explored the immeasurable possibilities of what forms sexuality can take. Coupled with his extraordinary linguistic technicality, Cummings has much stunned readers and critics alike through his experimental poems upon the subject. This remark appears to be precise; Cummings’ charm still fascinates readers up to four decades after his death.

Most of the comments on Cummings books in the internet indicated that today’s readers still favor him for his sensuality. The comment that best reflects their attitude towards him is Johnston’s post on the publishing of Cummings’ *Erotic Poems* (2010) in Goodreads online forum, a popular website on book recommendations, “No-one makes

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<sup>1</sup> Read on Fairley’s *Cummings’ Love Lyrics: Some Notes by a Female Linguist* (1979), Alkalay-Gut’s *Sex and the Single Engine: E. E. Cummings’ Experiment in Metaphoric Equation* (1996) and Miller’s *Sex on Wheels: A Reading of “she being Brand / -new”* (1997) for their criticisms on the quoted lines of the poem at the beginning of this introduction. These criticisms only went so far as to argue that the poetic aspects of the poem lead to the interpretation that this poem is erotic. However, the point that Cummings have conducted objectifying treatment on the poem’s female persona is not much presented.

you feel quite as good about being a woman as E.E. Cummings.” (Johnston, 2012). Other comments in the forum are also posted in virtually the same vein.

This is a rather remarkable female view on him which led to my attempt to comprehend why these women favor Cummings’ treatment of women. This is due to the fact that, upon my reading, it is revealed that a number of Cummings’ poems use an objectifying approach towards their treatment of women. This early finding prompted this research on the poems’ aspects of objectification of women to reveal whether Cummings celebrates women like what the internet users think or whether he actually still keeps them in the confines of female subordination.

Furthermore, Cummings’ period of time is a transitional era in which traditional gender roles were being changed. The subordinated asexual women started to take charge of their own sexuality and express it in a freer manner. This research attempts to reveal whether the modern and avant-garde Cummings’ way of thinking is in line with the currents of his time in this particular aspect.

The research is limited to the interpretation of the poem’s figurative languages. The focus of the interpretation is how women are being portrayed in the poem. Afterwards, Nussbaum’s seven aspects of objectification and their relation to the position of female persona in the selected poems is then analyzed. Theory of dehumanization which consists of animalization and mechanization is also used for the extended arguments to support the analysis. The research aims to propose a new level of understanding of Cummings in terms of his treatment of women. The findings of the research will reveal his actual stance on women’s position in the relationship between men and women.

Many of the previous researches on Cummings’ poems focus on his linguistic deviations and thematic aspects. Even though one of the major themes of his poem is romance, it is perplexing to see how limited the research is that focuses on gender relations within the poems. It has been a little more than forty years of Cummings’ passing yet a great portion of what can be observed of him has remained untouched. Even the very limited numbers of researches that are found to delve in the feminist reading of his poems still linger on the surface problems of female objectification and subordination.

Those researches have only examined how sexual meaning is implied in the poems yet have not much focused on how women are being treated in the poems. This research attempts to reveal the sort of objectification that Cummings applied on the women in his poems.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Elements of Poetry*

There are three types of form for poetry which are lyric, narrative and dramatic. The poems selected for this thesis falls into the category of narrative poetry because the

poems carry in them a plot. The poems' exposition is in the form of a story-telling with an introduction of the poem's persona at the onset. There will also be a conflict which is the motivating force of the narrative (Kennedy & Gioia, 2007, p. 665). In the selected poems, the speakers narrate what happens during the sexual act that they experience. In order to analyze the poems, intrinsic elements need to be identified first.

In order to gain full comprehension of a poem, an observation of the literal meaning of the figurative language in the poem need to be conducted first. This functions as a standpoint from where readers can further identify the comparisons that are taking place in the poetry. As a result, the intricacy of system of figurative languages may be identified as a whole. It is of a frequent occurrence that a poem may actually mean nothing more than its literal meaning. Hence, readers' sensitivity towards the extent of meaning in poetry is a necessary tool for the analysis (*ibid.*, p. 706-707).

Irony in poetry shows that there is discrepancy between what is being said by the speaker and what the implied meaning of the utterance is. "If the mask says one thing and we sense that the writer is in fact saying something else, the writer has adopted an ironic point of view" (*ibid.*, p. 688). Verbal irony is adopted when an utterance is written yet the implied meaning of it is actually the opposite of its literal meaning. Another type of irony is dramatic irony which is conveyed in the discrepancy between the knowledge of the characters that is limited and the knowledge of the readers which may be broader.

Tone is a created meaning in poetry that represents the sort of emotion or attitude that the writer has towards the subject being written. It can take many forms such as playfulness, solemnity, mocking, reverent, calmness or excitement. Nearly all the elements of poetry help to make up the tone of the poem. Therefore, a careful observation of these elements is necessary to identify the tone in a poem because it can be very subtle. The tone is considered as an end product of poetry analysis and it can be described by illustrating how the tone appears in the other elements of poetry (Arp & Johnson, 2002, p. 155).

The tone of the poem communicates a certain feeling. However, it can be put into a question of what it is that the speaker is communicating. In this sense, each poem has what is called a persona who is the speaker in the poem. The persona may be the actual author of the poem or it could be someone else that the actual author refers to or implied author. This is often the case with the usage of "I" in the poem where it may not be discernible whether the speaker is actually the actual or implied author. It may be so that the persona is not even a human. It can be an object, animal or even a concept, depending on the point of view of the poem's speaker (Kennedy & Gioia, 2007, p. 680-685).

Kennedy and Gioia defined imagery as "a word or sequence of words that refers to any sensory experience" (2007, p. 743). The reading of these words will incite a sense of visual imagery for sight, auditory imagery for sound and tactile imagery for touch. It functions to provide another dimension of description into the creation of meaning in

the poetry.

Figurative language is the manner in which a way to convey a meaning is conducted by the utterance of something different. The usage of figures of speech makes the meaning of a text cannot be taken literally (Arp & Johnson, 2002, p. 68). In this thesis, the figurative language being analyzed is simile, metaphor, alliteration, personification and hyperbole.

Simile and metaphor are alike whereas simile uses connective such as *like*, *as*, *than* or a verb such as *resembles*, metaphor uses the verb *to be*. The function of them is to compare two dissimilar objects as if they have a similarity in some aspect. When there is an absence of a connective or *to be* verb, yet there are still objects that are being compared, the comparison is called implied metaphor. Another type of metaphor is mixed metaphor which mixes all the aspects in a metaphor and make the production of meaning more complex than the other ones (Kennedy & Gioia, 2007, p. 768-769).

The compared items are either *named* or *implied* in the comparison. There are four forms of coupling of the literal and figurative meaning. In a simile or metaphor, both the literal object and figurative terms are named. In the second form, the literal meaning is named and the figurative is implied. In the third form, the literal is implied while the figurative is named. The last form is when both the literal and figurative are implied (Arp & Johnson, 2002, p. 69-70).

Personification is a figurative language in which objects other than human is given a sense as if it is a human (Kennedy & Gioia, 2007, p. 768-769). The objects that are given the figurative sense can be an animal, an object or a concept. It is a derivative of metaphor in which the literal meaning of the objects being compared is always a human. Personification directs readers to "visualize the literal term in human form" (Arp & Johnson, 2002, p. 72).

Hyperbole which is also called an overstatement is a figurative language which utilizes exaggeration to prove its point. However, the exaggeration needs to be taken literally for it works in "the service of truth" (ibid., p. 110). Hyperbole functions to create many effects such as humor, grave, fancy, restrain and conviction. The opposite of hyperbole is an understatement which means "saying less than one means may exist in what one says or merely in how one says it" (ibid., p. 111).

Symbol is said to be the most complex and difficult poetic figures to discern. It is because the difficulty of identifying its existence and meaning. Image, metaphor and symbol may overshadow each other in one usage of figurative and literal meaning of a comparison. Hence, to differentiate them, image usually mean "only what it is; the figurative term in a metaphor means something other than what it is; and a symbol means what it is and something more" (Arp & Johnson, 2002, p. 89-90).

Allegory is a derivative of symbol in which the objects being compared in the poem take the form of a narrative and are "employed in a continuous and consistent system

of equivalents" (Kennedy & Gioia, 2007, p. 898). Allegory is sometimes called extended metaphor or a series of symbols. However, it differs by having the comparison not just for one set of object but a system of it. The emphasis of allegory is not on the image being produced but the ulterior meaning of the comparison (Arp & Johnson, 2002, p. 97).

## OBJECTIFICATION & DEHUMANIZATION

The research is limited to the analysis of Nussbaum's seven aspects of objectification and their relation to the position of female persona in the selected poem for this paper. Theory of dehumanization which consists of animalization and mechanization is also used for the extended arguments to support the analysis. These aspects are identified in the produced meaning of the poems' figurative languages that are revealed in the interpretation of the poem.

The person who has presented a comprehensive explanation on objectification in a literary text is Nussbaum. Objectification is a pejorative term for the attitude and intention of one towards the other. It is the usage that the self conducts on someone else to attain one's certain desires. This action is reflected in a person's speech, thought and action and is usually applied in the sexual realm.

In the sexual realm, objectification of someone can be practiced so far that an action of dehumanizing entails. The other person is being made as an object for domination, conquest, violation, exploitation, possession and use (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 249). McKinnon explained that it has been such an inseparable aspect of women's life that their actions and thoughts automatically represent their objectified state. The condition is so innate that women actually receives "nourishment and sustenance" from it (*ibid.*, p. 250).

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Nussbaum emphasized that the criticism on objectification of literary texts may discern the objectification that is conducted by one character to another and the one that is conducted by the text as a whole towards the characters. In these observations, she



conveys that the object of analysis would be “the morality of the conduct that consists in representing, as well as with the morality of represented conduct (ibid., p. 255). She used Wayne Booth’s differentiation of approaches towards literature criticism which observes “(a) the narrator of a text (and/or its characters); (b) the implied author, that is, the sense of life embodied in the text taken as a whole; and (c) the real-life author, who has many properties lacked by the implied author, and may lack some that the implied author has” (ibid.).

In criticizing objectification in texts, she proposed the second emphasis which is the implied author in order to identify the sort of interaction that the text promotes. In analyzing the subject, Nussbaum reminded that a careful evaluation of context and circumstance is ought to be conducted because the propensity of objection in the conduct varies according to the sort of consent that the participants hold (ibid., p. 256).

Nussbaum identifies the seven ways that one can be objectified which are:

1. Instrumentality: The objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes.
2. Denial of autonomy: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.
3. Inertness: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.
4. Fungibility: The objectifier treats the object as interchangeable (a) with other objects of the same type, and/or (b) with objects of other types.
5. Violability: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that is permissible to break up, smash, break into.
6. Ownership: The objectifier treats the object as something that is owned by another, can be bought or sold, etc.
7. *Denial of subjectivity: The objectifier treats the object as something whose experience and feeling (if any) need not be taken into account.* (ibid., p. 257)

Nussbaum explicated how objectification is not always a deprecating conduct because the context and circumstance is critical to the total analysis. In terms of sexual satisfaction, she borrowed Kant’s argument that objectification may be an enriching part of relationship when the partners allow each other to objectify each other (ibid., 267). The seven aspects of objectification may be conducted with the consent of the participants, yet this condition may be hard to attain due to the variety of contexts and circumstances that pervade the relationship. There is a necessity for a meticulous observation of the relationship dynamics in order to identify whether the objectification conducted does not harm the participants.

She also restated Dworkin’s argument that men and women learned to eroticize objectification with the upholding of gender hierarchy and domination. Men project their desires on women, and in turn, women accepts their objectified condition. As a result, for women, “sex entails a forfeiture of humanity, being turned into something rather

than someone" (ibid., p. 268). However, Nussbaum poses a hindrance in the realization of an equal objectification. She rebuts Sunstein who proposed that objectification may be a wonderful part of sexual life by pointing out that it will be a rare phenomenon given the society's condition that are prone to "self-conscious aloofness and the repression of feeling" (ibid., p. 274).

In the dynamics of an objectifying relationship, Nussbaum purported that women may be accused of responsibility for the objectification conducted on them. It is due to the eroticized sexualization of women that women has been conditioned to desire because of the hauling subordination that they endured. "The women, including whatever signs of humanity they display, are just there to be used as sex objects for men in whatever way suits them. The eroticization of the women's inertness, her lack of autonomy, her violability – and the assuaging fiction that this is what she has asked for, this is what nature has dictated for her" (ibid., p. 280).

The extension of objectification is dehumanization. The condition of dehumanization is that the person is being severely objectified that the components that make him or her up as a human is being taken away. Haslam proposes that in turn, the person is being reduced as animal-like or represented as objects or automata (2006, p. 252). Haslam also reviews the many dimensions of dehumanization that is seen through feminist perspectives:

*Other feminist work argues that women are typically assigned lesser humanness than men. According to Ortner (1974), women are pan-culturally "seen as representing a lower order of being, as being less transcendental of nature than men" (p. 73), and femaleness is equated with animality, nature, and childlikeness. Similarly, Citrin, Roberts, and Fredrickson (2004) discussed the ways in which femaleness is culturally associated with lesser degrees of civility and emotional control, and the unmodified "natural" female body is often seen as disgustingly animal-like (ibid., p. 253).*

When aspects of objectification is applied on a person, the conduct entails the denial of components of humanness. The components that make up humans are categorized as Human Uniqueness and Human Nature. Human Uniqueness refer to the characteristics that differentiates human with other objects. The characteristics categorized in it is said to be only owned by humans, and dehumanization occurs when someone is being denied of them.

The components are civility, refinement, moral sensibility, rationality, logic and maturity. When one is being denied of the components of Human Uniqueness, he or she is considered to present lack of culture, coarseness, amorality, lack of self-restraint, irrationality, instinct and child-likeness. The denial of Human Uniqueness implies that the person does not possess the very characteristics that differentiates them with animals. In other words, the person is being compared with animals that do not own Human Uniqueness. This type of dehumanization is called animalistic dehumanization (ibid., 256-257).

Furthermore, Human Nature consists of the characteristics that are considered as essential to human being but do not necessarily differentiate humans with other objects. It may be so that animals also possess these characteristics. However, the characteristics are still considered a fundamental component of being a human. The characteristics are emotional responsiveness, interpersonal warmth, cognitive openness, agency, individuality and depth. When one is being dehumanized, they are considered as having the opposite of these traits which are inertness, coldness, rigidity, passivity, fungibility and superficiality. This type of dehumanization is called mechanistic dehumanization (ibid).

In terms of dehumanization on women, Nussbaum proposes that the consideration of women being asexual that often pervades the Victorian conception of women is a form of objectification. "Dehumanization of women rests upon and derives strength from the denial of women's erotic potentiality, the insistence that women be seen as sex-less things and not identified also with their genital organs" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 277). The denial of women's sexuality is presented in how women are being represented as not having sexual desires on her own and being passive in their sexual relationships. Nussbaum adds that sexualization of the human body parts is a form of animalistic dehumanization.

This conduct takes the form of separating the body parts as if it is not the component that makes up the person, and sexually objectify the parts to the extent that they are ascribed the characteristics of non-human. Naming the body parts in a disrespectful manner is also a form of this dehumanization. "That is a response that dehumanizes us, by reducing to something animal what properly is a major part of the humanity in us, and the individuality as well. We have to learn to call our genital organs by proper names—that would be at least the beginning of properly complete human regard for one another" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 277).

## METHODS OF ANALYSIS

The research is conducted with the new criticism approach and descriptive analysis method with the corpus *first she like a piece of ill-oiled*. The analysis will be conducted using Nussbaum's theory of the seven aspects of objectification. The analysis elaborates on the meanings of the figurative languages in the poem and reveals the aspects of objectification that is conducted on the poem's female persona. The analysis will show how objectification is being operated in the sexual relationship which consequently dehumanizes the female persona.

The interpretations of each metaphor critically contribute to the makeup of the narrative that the speaker creates about the women in the poems. The reason why each figurative language is important to be interpreted is because it has a certain degree of influence on the totality of female objectification conducted in the poem. Even the

ones that are found to not directly relate to the women's objectification still have their own contribution on the speakers' illustration of them because they show the speaker's treatment of the lady from his evaluation of her.

The figurative language either shows the woman or the man's characteristics, or the dynamics of their relationship. Another reason why all the stanzas need to be interpreted in the analysis is because one stanza may be strongly diminutive while the next one may exceedingly elevate her because it shows the speaker's adoration to her. Hence, due to the fluctuation of views on women in the poems, an interpretation of each stanza is necessary so the poem as a whole can be discerned, and the dynamics of the speaker's relationship with the woman can be identified from that total interpretation. The dynamics of the relationship is where the aspects of objectification are found. Finally, the severity of female objectification in the poems may be identified.

## FINDINGS

The poem is a free verse of five stanzas with the speaker who is a man, and he narrates his sexual experience with a woman that is considered as unkempt, filthy and violent machinery. This poem has a nuance of war in it due to the references of machines, guns, violence and aggression which also represent the dynamics of their sexual encounter. A theme of transformation and contradiction is apparent in this poem. In their intercourse, she is illustrated as transforming into dirtiness which is shown in the poem's foregrounding of the space where she is given a metaphor as falling into. Furthermore, after all the diminutive description of her, she is suddenly ascribed a sense of softness at the end of the poem.

The main argument for this poem is that Nussbaum's aspects of objectification are represented in his narration of her sexual actions. The woman is dehumanized by how the speaker's description reduces her into a mechanical object. The objectification conducted on her is less subtle than the previous two poems because even at the surface level of this poem's reading, Nussbaum's aspects are evidently apparent in the speaker's observation of the woman. Moreover, his description breaks her sexuality off of the humanness that is supposedly integrated in the totality of her being. The analysis will interpret the metaphors that reveal the dynamics of their objectifying relationship and it will be divided into five sections which are:

1. The illustration of her as a mechanical object in the first stanza;
2. Her transformation into violent dirtiness in the second stanza;
3. The dynamics of their relationship and how they are submerged into it in the third stanza;
4. The war-like state of their sexual encounter in the fourth stanza and
5. The contradiction of her softness in the fifth stanza.

The tone of the narration is comparable to the enthusiast of a war veteran

narrating a story of a past battle. This is signified in how systematic the narration is, how the dependent clauses in the use of compound sentences function as the speaker's exaggeration points and his choice of judgmental adjectives to describe her that is characteristic of a detested troop's towards his enemies in a battle. This kind of narration reflects their sexual intercourse which is given a metaphor as a battle where in the end; the woman declares a truce as her large mouth mutters "kiss pleece." The battle signifies the intensity of dramatic lust in the sexual conduct. Hence, due to the war-like status of their relationship, aspects that pertain to the expression of feelings and love are absent. The poem presents a war veteran who embroidered his narration.

*first she like a piece of ill-oiled  
machinery does a few naked tricks (1-2)*

In the introduction of the woman, the speaker already reduces her to a diminutive object with the quantifier "a piece of ill-oiled machinery." At a metaphoric level, she is being denied of her humanness by him belittling her body into a piece of object that is dilapidated. She is regarded as a violable person so it is not a matter that the wholeness of her integrity is being broken up which leaves her as one piece of that object. The object chosen to associate her with is a further dehumanization of her which reduces her as an engine. It is especially ironic that the choice of object to describe her is a piece of machinery since the two forms of dehumanization are theorized as animalization and mechanization of a person.

The metaphor of her being a machine that is ill-oiled implies that her body is in a bad form. It is dull, unkempt and lacking in vitality. She disregards the treatment of her own body which makes it lackluster and unappealing to the speaker. The condition of her body does not suit the speaker's ideals of women's body. Through this implication of the first line, it is discernible that the woman is being instrumentalized for the speaker's sexual purpose and his views confined her to his expectations.

What is more, the reduction of her into a piece of an inanimate object involuntarily implies the denial of her autonomy. The woman's inertness depends on the speaker's operation of her, and she is not able to operate her own machine since she is the machine. This deprives her of autonomy and her own determination. She is considered lifeless and this treatment breaks her off of her humanity. Following the denial of autonomy is the denial of her subjectivity also. Because she is an inanimate object, her feelings and how she handles the experience is not a matter of concern for the speaker. This is proven in the whole poem where there is no account of her subjectivity being agreed upon.

Next, she is said to do "a few naked tricks". The naked tricks refer to her sexual movements which imply in them an association of it being neat and clever such as the tricks of an illusionist. However, the ascribing of the adjectival "a few" represents how the number of tricks she can perform is limited. Therefore, the stanza indicates how her

inoperative machine or body can still work even though only to a limited capacity. Her function as a sexual object for the speaker can still be utilized.

*next into unwhiteness, clumsily  
lustful, plunges—covering the soiled  
pillows with her violent hair (3-5)*

Next, it is described that as the sexual encounter progresses, there is a transformation within her. This is signified in how the woman is described as plunging into unwhiteness in a clumsy and lustful manner. The action of plunging into unwhiteness implies how she is falling into a state of dirtiness which is what the speaker thinks of her aroused state. Moreover, her clumsy lust further illustrates the range of bad characteristics of her sexuality.

Aside from being dilapidated in form, her sexual prowess is considered as inept. The recklessness and dirtiness of her sexuality gets another emphasis in the next line in which her head is considered as resting on a dirty pillow and that the hair is personalized as having a violent attitude. Her hair is a *pars pro toto* which represents her violent self. The soiled pillow foregrounds the condition of their relationship which is only limited to the dirty release of their sexual needs.

At this point of the poem, the dilapidated woman is portrayed as transforming into dirtiness in a violent and reckless manner at the initiation of sexual contact. Even though her condition prior to the sexual encounter is not described, it is certain that sex has turned her into so. The portrayal of her transforming into dirtiness is a diminutive gesture conducted on her because of two reasons.

Firstly, she is broken off of her sexuality. Sexuality is not considered as an integral part of her but as a separate state which she transforms into. In this way, the speaker has conducted a dehumanization on her in which the aspects that make her up as a whole human being is taken away. Secondly, the association of dirtiness in this transformation further devalues her sexuality. It is as if her rights of sexuality is removed off of her that her sexual expression is not accepted as something acceptable.

The condition of it being dirty implies a sense of rejection and undesirability. The speaker does not accept the form of the woman's sexuality. This entails that there is another form of sexuality that should be more accepted which is a cleaner expression of a woman's lust. The categorization of sexuality as being dirty or clean is problematic due to the objectifying attitude that it represents. This treatment of her sexuality signifies that she is violable and it is permissible to break her up off of her sexuality. The components that make up her integrity is separated from her; her sexuality is not considered as something natural for her to express and the ascribing of dirtiness worsen the objectification on her. It is not enough that the speaker instrumentalizes her for his sexual purpose. He further objectifies her by positioning her as violable.

*(eagerly then the huge greedily  
 Bed swallows easily our antics,  
 like smooth deep sweet ooze where  
 two guns lie, smile, grunting.) (6-9)*

In this stanza, the bed is a foregrounding of the relationship between the speaker and the woman. The bed as a location for their sexual intercourse serves as a metaphoric basis of their relations. Such is previously implied in the dirty pillow that her head rests on. The characteristics of the bed being eager, huge and greedy represent the attitudes surrounding their sexual experience. The conduct is consensual and facilitates their egotistical need to fulfill their lustful sexual desires. The part where the bed is said to easily swallow the speaker and the woman's antics signifies that their relationship naturally caters to the two characters' action of fooling around.

After that, the bed's comparability to the "deep sweet ooze" signifies that the two people are pleased with this condition. They are represented as guns that are lying down while smiling and grunting in the ooze. The smiling and grunting is their response to the pleasures that the sexual experience gives them. Whereas the ooze's characteristic as deep and sweet in which they lie in, represents how they are deeply engulfed in the sexual experience. The diction of ooze to represent their experience also strengthens the ascribing of dirtiness in their conduct. Having the guns lie in the ooze resembles how two guns are dropped into mud during a battle. This association of guns and mud foregrounds the next stanza's point that their sexual encounter is war-like.

*"C'est la guerre" i probably suppose,  
 c'est la guerre busily hunting  
 for the valve which will stop this.  
 As i push aside roughly her nose  
 Hearing the large mouth mutter kiss pleece (10-14)*

The poem is ended with the speaker's remark that the sexual conduct is like a war. The part when the speaker is hunting for a valve which will stop the war is a sexual metaphor of him looking for her vagina or the passage way into which he could penetrate her and finish the conduct. Again, an aspect of instrumentalization of the female's body is apparent in the attitude of the speaker conducting a hunt for the woman's vagina. Furthermore, the metaphor usage of it as being a valve also reinforces the objectification because the vagina is only considered as a passage way to the speaker's purpose.

Throughout the poem, a war-like sense has been ascribed to their sexual relation through the speaker's own utterance and the range of metaphors that uses battle terms that signify violence and roughness. The level of lust is represented by the violence and roughness, and this portrayal implies aspects of objectification from the speaker. However, the closing lines of the poem surprisingly signify a contradictory characteristic

in the woman.

The two last lines show that in the midst of sexual height, the woman suddenly requests for the speaker to kiss her. It may seem typical that the woman requests for it but the request is given a sense of softness with her plea of "pleece" which may be a pun of "please" or also "fleece." This request of her is done while the speaker was roughly pushing aside her nose during their rough sex. What is peculiar is the sense of softness that suddenly appears after all the roughness done. This implies that while the sex has been rough there is this one surprise that the woman has. Furthermore, the softness in the end signifies that the woman finally surrenders in the battle or their sexual conduct, and in the end, the speaker wins the battle between them.

## CONCLUSION

This poem is an androcentric take on a sexual act between a man and a woman. The woman is conditioned as being the weaker side that loses the battle and his portrayal of her illustrates his objectifying treatment. Aspect of instrumentality is apparent throughout the poem as the woman's mere function is for the man's sexual release. His illustration of her being a neglected machine also bolsters this objectification. The woman is also considered as violable in the sense that it is permissible for the speaker to separate her from her sexuality.

Sexuality is considered as something that does not make her up as a whole human being. The attribution of dirtiness in her sexuality further dehumanizes her since it ascribes to it a sense of undesirability. Aspect of fungibility is not shown in the poem because there is no indication that the woman is swappable with other women or objects. What is more evident is the denial of subjectivity and autonomy because there is no evident in the poem that the speaker cares about the woman's thoughts, feelings and experience.

The portrayal of her as a machine denies her of her own autonomy because she does not have the control of her own determination and choices as she is an engine that is operated by the speaker. Any movement or inertness that she expresses is done as her mechanic response of sexual arousal in their dynamics. Hence, her inertness is shown in the poem because she clearly moves about during the intercourse yet the moves are limited to the fulfillment of sexual desire which leaves her being sexualized. Therefore, the worthiness of her presence is only limited to the fulfillment of lust. Lastly, aspect of ownership is not shown in the poem. The woman is considered as a machine that he uses but he does not seem to own the machine.

To conclude, Nussbaum's aspects of objectification appear in the speaker's treatment of the woman who is metaphorized as an old machine. The objectification also appears in the war-like dynamics of their relationship. The surprise in the end when the



woman suddenly becomes softer does not imply anything more than that the speaker finally turns out as the winner in the battle.

This poem is a pseudo feminist poem in which a sexually liberated woman is presented on the surface yet it is found that she is still confined in female objectification. Furthermore, the poem signifies a sense of transformation and contradiction in the woman. At the touch of sexual contact, the woman turns into something other than her usual self. The woman turns into dirtiness which reinforces her position of being an objectified person because her sexuality is being dehumanized.

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#### Appendix

##### First she like a piece of ill-oiled — 1918

*first she like a piece of ill-oiled  
machinery does a few naked tricks*

*next into unwhiteness, clumsily  
lustful, plunges — covering the soiled  
pillows with her violent hair  
(eagerly then the huge greedily*

*Bed swallows easily our antics,  
like smooth deep sweet ooze where  
two guns lie, smile, grunting.)*

*"C'est la guerre" i probably suppose,  
c'est la guerre busily hunting  
for the valve which will stop this,  
as i push aside roughly her nose  
Hearing the large mouth mutter kiss pleece*